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U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk and Melissa Bean are putting together a bipartisan panel to provide a suburban counterweight to Chicago influence on road and commuter train financial decisions.

The Suburban Transportation Commission will be dedicated to keeping the current funding formula among Metra, the CTA and Pace, ensuring that tax and fee increases to fund the three first are approved by voters and preserving suburban parity in the makeup of the Regional Transportation Authority.

“We want to make sure decisions are focused on where half of all citizens in Illinois live, which is the suburbs. And especially where the economic growth is taking place,” said Kirk, a Highland Park Republican.

The suburban push is being made now because the CTA is seeking a bailout of its employee pension problem from state lawmakers. The CTA soon will start owing \$200 million a year to shore up its pension fund. Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley told reporters last week he’s concerned the issue isn’t on anyone’s radar screen in Springfield. And when the powerful Daley makes concerns public, often the ball starts to roll.

“It’s a hot topic,” Kirk said. “We want to make sure we do right by the CTA, but not at the expense of suburban commuters.”

A couple of years ago, then-Cook County Board President John Stroger led a push to get the makeup of the RTA board — which is currently evenly divided between city and suburban members — changed to benefit the city. One proposal would have allowed the governor to appoint a powerful chief who then would have been able to change the funding formula. The RTA doles out money to the CTA, Metra and Pace according to the formula.

A recent state audit blasted the RTA for poor leadership and a bad financial situation, which

could pressure lawmakers in Springfield to act.

“That lends additional outside credibility to make a case for (funding changes),” said Bean, a Barrington Democrat. “We just want to get ahead of the curve.”

While suburban commuters are the primary beneficiaries of Metra trains, many of them also use CTA buses and trains to finish their daily downtown treks. The new suburban group claims that’s not lost on them.

“We really need a very cohesive system that works together. It’s not an us versus them situation,” Bean said.

The group will hold its first meeting at 10 a.m. Tuesday at the Lake County Transportation Center in Libertyville.